

Murphy Administration Launches Community College Innovation Challenge

Community Colleges Invited to Apply for Pilot Program for Free Tuition and Fees for New Jersey Students

TRENTON, N.J. – Community college students in New Jersey may be able to attend free of tuition and fees in the spring semester of 2019, if their college applies and is selected to participate in the Community College Innovation Challenge, a new pilot program launched today. New Jersey's Secretary of Higher Education and the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) have invited the state's 19 community colleges to submit an application for the program.

"I'm very excited that the Secretary of Higher Education and HESAA are moving forward to make higher education more accessible and affordable for New Jersey families," said Acting Governor Sheila Oliver. "Having the opportunity to obtain a college degree was an instrumental part of my life, and in today's job market, it's a matter of fairness and equality. Making higher education attainable will help secure a successful future for our students and strengthen New Jersey's workforce and economy."

New Jersey's fiscal year 2019 state budget includes new funding for the first phase of Governor Murphy's community college initiative, including up to \$20 million for Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) awards to be applied directly to eligible student accounts. At participating colleges, students with adjusted gross incomes between \$0 and \$45,000 who take six or more credits in the spring 2019 semester will be eligible to receive CCOG awards to cover tuition and educational fees, after applying any other federal or state grant aid which the student receives.

"All too often, the cost of college prevents students from earning the postsecondary credentials they need to boost their careers," said Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis, New Jersey's Secretary of Higher Education. "This initiative is an important step in improving affordability for thousands of community college students, increasing their likelihood of completion, and strengthening the talent pipeline for the state's economy."

"Governor Murphy's goal is to make two years of community college tuition free for students across the state," said David Socolow, Executive Director of the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. "We're taking a crucial first step by testing the Community College Opportunity Grants at a select number of colleges. This initial phase will not only help thousands of students next spring, both recent high school graduates and working adults, but also will provide valuable lessons for future expansions of the program to offer free tuition to more students."

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and HESAA will jointly evaluate applications from colleges to select an initial group of colleges whose students will be made eligible for CCOG awards. The application specifies key criteria including the colleges' plans for outreach to and support for students, how their cost projections fit within statewide funding constraints, and geographic diversity. All colleges that submit an application will be eligible to receive a capacity building grant of at least \$250,000 to plan for subsequent phases of the program.

Colleges have [until August 31, 2018](#) to submit their application. Participating institutions will be notified in the early fall to begin planning and recruiting students.

To access the Notice of Fund Availability application, colleges can [click here](#).